

PHOTO-SECESSIONISM
AND ITS OPPONENTS

ANOTHER LETTER—THE SIXTH

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Mr. Mortimer, F. R. P. S., Editor of the "Amateur Photographer," London, makes a point of my not having printed the letters of my opponents to which mine were a reply. To avoid doing Mr. Mortimer even the suspicion of an injustice I reprint *verbatim* his editorial entitled, "The Self-Seeker," which appeared in the "Amateur Photographer," September 20, 1910, together with my reply:—

"We have on previous occasions expressed our admiration for the individual work of many of the members of that body of American pictorialists known as the "Photo-Secession." It is a pity, therefore, to note that Mr. Stieglitz, of New York, who "bosses" the concern, adopts such curious methods to achieve notoriety at any price. Our readers may remember the two examples of work by Mrs. Annie Brigman, reproduced in THE A. P. "Empire Number," and our acknowledgment that they were reproductions from photogravures in CAMERA WORK and not from originals. Mr. Stieglitz promptly seized the opportunity to write a long, abusive, and inaccurate letter to us, pointing out *inter alia* his own high moral standard and the entire wickedness of the Editor of the A. P. It has since come to our knowledge that Mr. Stieglitz tried to induce the editors of photographic papers in America and England, and possibly on the continent, to publish this precious example of vituperation, for the purpose, we suppose, of injuring THE A. P. As the editors were gentlemen, he was told to mind his own business. Foiled in this direction, he has now published a series of five abusive and quarrelsome letters to editors (ourselves included) and others, in the hopes, we imagine, that they may be quoted by the smaller fry of the photographic world. The title of the pamphlet—for some reason best known to himself—is "Photo-Secessionism and Its Opponents." He loudly trumpets his ideals, which appear to be of the self-seeking and get-off-the-earth type, and we note he carefully avoids publication of the replies to his letters. It is difficult to ascertain quite where the opposition to his pet schemes comes in—unless it is

in his imagination—especially if we take as an example the letter to ourselves, which merely consists of an outbreak regarding the publication of the two pictures referred to in THE A. P. No, Mr. Stieglitz, it is too thin. "Hitting below the belt in this manner will never further your cause one iota."

AN OPEN LETTER TO MR. F. J. MORTIMER, F. R. P. S.,
EDITOR OF THE "AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER."

PHOTO-SECESSION, 291 FIFTH AVENUE

New York, October 10, 1910.

SIR:—

I welcome your "Editorial Comment" of September 20th, 1910, entitled "The Self-Seeker," not because it affords me an opportunity to reply to the mis-statements of facts it sets forth, nor because it places in my hands a rod with which to castigate one who is poltroon enough to shelter himself behind malicious fabrications, not yet because it gives me pleasure to point the finger of scorn at a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, who so far forgets the dignity of his office as editor of an influential magazine and his position as a councillor of an honorable institution, as to make use of the contemptible methods of a despicable journalism to jeer at and belittle me and my confrères. I do not welcome it for these reasons. It is never an inspiring sight to see any man sacrifice the best of his humanity in order to get the better of an opponent.

I do, however, welcome your editorial in that it furnishes me with an excuse which otherwise might savor of impertinent obtrusiveness, for a restatement of what the Photo-Secession spirit is, that your readers may learn for themselves if these are, indeed, as you so prettily phrase it, "of the self-seeking and get-off-the-earth type."

But first, I will, with or without your permission, correct your mis-statements of facts and lay bare the naked viciousness of your innuendos.

You say you reproduced the two examples of Mrs. Annie Brigman's work and acknowledged them to be reproduced from photogravures in CAMERA WORK. There is no doubt about your having reproduced the examples of Mrs. Brigman's work, but your present statement is so worded as to make the reader believe that your acknowledgment of the source was simultaneous with your reproduction. You know this is not so. You reproduced the photogravures without any acknowledgment. It was because you failed in this proper duty that I wrote you the letter which you now complain was "a hit below the belt."

It was only after you received that letter which pointed out to you your unseemly and graceless conduct that you made the acknowledgment. If this "hitting below the belt" compels an editor and an F. R. P. S. to act honorably, then am I indeed glad of the prompt efficacy of my blow.

"It has since come to your knowledge," you say, "that Mr. Stieglitz tried to induce the editors of photographic papers in America and England, and possibly on the continent, to publish this precious example of vituperation [i.e., my letter to you], for the purpose, we suppose, of injuring THE A. P."

Your supposition, Mr. F. J. Mortimer, F. R. P. S., does you no credit. It is on a par with the whole tone of your comment. It is because I have such an esteem for "THE A. P." and recognize its influence that I am jealous of its good name and good conduct. And it was because of this jealousy that I wrote you the letter that you might become alive to the responsibility of your position as its editor, and that you might rise in dignity to the dignity you assumed. How mistaken I was in my appeal, your present "editorial comment" is a pathetic proof.

At the time I sent you the letter which has so incensed you, I informed you that I was also sending copies of it to Messrs. Hazell, Watson & Viney (the publishers of THE A. P.), to Mr. R. Child Bayley, editor of "Photography and Focus," and to the editor of "The British Journal of Photography." I made no request to any of these gentlemen to publish the letter. My reason for sending it to them was to make them aware of the injustice done by editorial indiscretion. To no one on the continent of Europe did I either send the letter or communicate in any manner on the matter. The only editor in America who became aware of my communication to you was Mr. Fraprie, and to him I read the letter, without giving him a copy of it, when he chanced one day to call on me. I read the letter to him in the presence of other gentlemen interested in photography. Mr. Fraprie expressed his surprise at the time as to how you had obtained the Brigman pictures, and remarked that he was glad he was not the cause of its writing.

So far by way of direct answer to what has come to your knowledge. What has now come to your knowledge is what you always had knowledge of. But what is behind your

peculiar phrase—"possibly on the continent"? You have no knowledge here. Yet you drag in this phrase of invidious suggestion without rhyme or reason. It is as if I should say that Mr. F. J. Mortimer, F. R. P. S., was a friend of Mr. Fraprie, a correspondent of Mr. Zimmerman, and *possibly* in a conspiracy with both these individuals against me.

But who, may I ask, are the editors you state told me to mind my own business? Will you name one? The day after I read your "editorial comment" I received a copy of a joint letter from the editors of "The British Journal of Photography" and "Photography and Focus," addressed to you, asking you to publish their letter and straightly denying your editorial statement that they had told me to mind my own business when I sent them copies of my letter to you. I take the liberty to quote from this letter of Mr. G. E. Brown and Mr. R. Child Bayley, the final paragraph: "We shall be glad if you will allow us to disassociate ourselves entirely from the statements in your paragraph."

Fie, fie, Mr. F. J. Mortimer, F. R. P. S.! It would seem as if you intend to keep me busy "hitting you below the belt" in my endeavors to arouse your sense of decency.

"Foiled in this direction," you go on to say, in my endeavors to induce editors to print my letters to you, "he has published a series of five abusive and quarrelsome letters to editors (ourselves included) and others, in the hope, we imagine, that they may be quoted by the smaller fry of the photographic world."

You do your imagination an injustice, Mr. F. J. Mortimer, F. R. P. S., by so paltry a suggestion. The imagination which could call my letters "abusive and quarrelsome" and which could see a volume of correspondence "to editors and others" in my poor four letters to two editors and one gentleman, should surely have given riper fruit than this impoverished hope. The imagination of the writer of so extraordinary a lucubration as this editorial comment is lost in its present sphere of activity. It belongs to the old order of travelling minstrels who gave us our fables and our fishermen's tales.

Believe me, Mr. F. J. Mortimer, F. R. P. S., I have no need to ask editors, either the big or the little fry, for publicity. I printed 1000 copies of my pamphlet "Photo-Secessionism and Its Opponents," and sent copies of it to public libraries, art insti-

tutions, art patrons, and art editors in all places where I believed a just understanding of the conditions in the photographic world was necessary. Had I so pleased I could have printed the letters in CAMERA WORK, but I do not care to introduce a controversy of this nature into its pages. CAMERA WORK is a record, not of bereavements, but of achievements.

I waited sometime before publishing my pamphlet in order to give you an opportunity to explain that your appropriation of the Brigman pictures was an oversight. You failed to take advantage of my grace and thereby lost your soul. Immediately on the heels of your "latrocity" came criticisms, written and printed, of me and the Photo-Secession, from Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Fraprie, for the attitude I was assuming in my management of the coming Buffalo Exhibition. In order to anticipate any possible misrepresentation or misunderstanding I decided to print my replies to Mr. Zimmerman and Mr. Fraprie, in which I had explained my position and used the pamphlet so framed as a public answer. I included my letter to you, not because you yourself meant anything, but because the letter to you contributed to the exposing of a perilous situation for which you and others were responsible. As I hold the future well-being of photography very dear I must see to it that those forces which militate against it be opposed and destroyed. That is one of my self-seeking "ideals." I did not print the letters of my opponents because my letters either quoted or implied all that was best in their letters, and in no point did I misrepresent or do them any injustice.

I am not surprised at your inability to understand the meaning of Photo-Secessionism, even though my letters in the pamphlet were written and published for the very purpose of explaining it. Its spirit is utterly opposed to the spirit of your editorial comment. Nor am I surprised that you should interpret it to mean my "pet schemes." I am not concerned about explaining myself to you, but as I shall print this letter as an addendum to a new edition of my pamphlet, I am taking this opportunity to say a few words about Photo-Secessionism in addition to what I have already said in the pamphlet.

For this purpose I can do no better than quote what Mr. J. B. Kerfoot, one of the active men in the Photo-Secession wrote on this matter for No. 29 of CAMERA WORK, (page 49):

“ It is a movement which, inaugurated for a specific purpose and long known by a specific if somewhat cryptic name, has come by a process of growth and elision to be known as The Secession. This movement was inaugurated with the sole aim of vindicating the claims of photography to citizenship in the republic of art. It has long since made good this endeavor. And it is not without significance that it now finds itself, among other activities, maintaining an island of refuge for art amid the traffic of an essentially photographic philistinism. It started as a forlorn hope. It finds itself one division of a desperate, but not a despicable, army. For The Secession, although independent in its inception and individual in its development, although locally isolated and at odds with its immediate environment, neither stands alone today nor is out of touch with its times. There are other secessions. And there are hosts of secessionists, some of them all but unconscious of their enlistment. Pictorial art is but one of the least of their fields of battle. On the heights of religion, on the uplands of science, on the slopes of literature, on the level arable plains of life their fluttering standard has been, or is being, raised. They speak in diverse tongues. They wear unlike insignia. They follow unrelated leaders or fight leaderless. But they are unwittingly enrolled under one banner.”

You, Mr. F. J. Mortimer, are a signal example of what Secessionism does not stand for.

(Signed) ALFRED STIEGLITZ.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 20, 1910.

